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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the author anticipates and responds to questions of would-be critics of the yearbook. He reviews the purposes served by the volume, the contributions it is making to those involved in the preparation of elementary educators, the uniqueness of its coverage, and the manner in which it should be read. He concludes by labeling the yearbook a landmark publication that will serve as a basis for practitioners, laymen, and scholars who are attempting to understand the basic structure, function, and content of elementary schooling in our society. (Author/WM)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
105th Annual Convention
San Francisco, Calif. March 17-21, 1973

SPEAKER: Jay D. Scribner, Chairman, Department of Urban Educational Policy and Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif.

TOPIC: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES--PART 1 REPORT, NSSE YEARBOOK FOR 1973

PLACE: Plaza Square Ballroom East, Hyatt House-Union Square

TIME: Sunday, March 18, 2:30 P.M.

PROGRAM: Page 33

FOR RELEASE UPON DELIVERY

In preparation for this introduction I have posed four questions for your consideration.

First, why on earth is such a yearbook necessary; particularly, on a topic which has been chronicled in one form or another for more than three centuries in the United States?

Second, what will this yearbook contribute to me whose interest is in the preparation of educators for a variety of roles in elementary and secondary education, or for you who may be actually involved directly with the education of elementary school children?

Then third, so what? What is unique about this book that others in the field do not already cover?

And finally, not only why should it be read, but how should it be read?

Question One: It's Necessity

Let us turn back now to the first question---"Why was this yearbook on the Elementary School in the United States necessary?" The simplest answer is that it represents a "first" for the National Society. Startling a fact as that might be --- not since the days of Colonel Francis Parker, John Dewey and other notables we recognize as the pedagogical pioneers for elementary education has there been a full edition of an NSSE Yearbook on the elementary school. Perhaps this is reason enough for the necessity of this yearbook. It is a landmark publication in the annals of the Society.

Of course, if you should take the time to dig deep into last few pages of the yearbook, you will find a section entitled "Publications of the National Society for the Study of Education". Skimming through the yearbook titles makes it abundantly clear that elementary education has not been ignored throughout the Society's history. In fact, the elementary school, it's curriculum, the application of theories of learning and other significant aspects of the learning conditions of the young are found in a great many of the earlier editions.

To repeat our first question, "...Was it necessary?" My answer is an empatic yes, but for quite different reasons than those just espoused. The fact that it is a landmark volume for the Society does not say much about its substance. The editors John I. Goodlad and Harold Shane assert at the outset that "In spite of

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the neglect, and the low status often accorded the elementary school...," a great deal of human interest surrounds it. It is the school closest to the people. It is the school most amenable to change, yet the most perplexing in its resistance to change.

Thus, as the school "closest to the people" it is most vulnerable to the social, political forces of society, and yet it has shown remarkable successes; nationally and internationally; in developed and underveloped nations. It somehow copes with a world of explosive, accelerated and unpredictable change. Coping with change is the real question to which the 72nd Yearbook of the NSSE--The Elementary School in the United States-- is addressed. That is why it is necessary.

Question Two: Its Contribution

The second question we raised dealt with the book's contribution to either those of us directly or indirectly involved in educating elementary children. The best way I could prepare a response to this question was, first, to understand how the yearbook was organized, or better still what appeared to be the rationale for its contents: and secondly, to try to sift through the 420 pages or so for the major substantive themes in the yearbook.

If we accept the assumption that change has become so intense that efforts to contend with it are increasingly more difficult, then the yearbook's contribution becomes slightly more vivid. I recently read where Margaret Mead holds that the impact of change has made the parents of teenagers immigrants to the society in which they live. What Mead is suggesting is that many native born Americans have become immigrants to the society in which they live by virtue of the speed of change that characterizes life in a modern, technological, pre-figurative society.

This yearbook cuts into many of our problems in society, generally as they relate to the speed of change and the elementary school, and in particular as they relate to the child, the curriculum, the teacher, the principal and the processes at play within the school. It unveils some of the assumptions upon which our thinking and planning have been based and it questions the validity of those assumptions. It implies that a great deal of our thinking and planning or decision making and establishing of priorities are inbedded in the past rather than the future. The organization and rationale for the yearbook, as I see it, helps us out of the dilemma of heading into the future with our eyes fixed firmly on the rear view miror.

As you may already know if you have received a copy of the yearbook, it is divided into four sections. The first section, entitled The Elementary School in Perspective, deals with questions of "What is it?", "Where did it come from?","What are some of the unaltered, timeworn assumptions that emerge out of past centuries and remain with us today?".

The second section focuses on Forces and Ideas Shaping the Elementary School. This section seems to be saying, "OK, we know what it is, but why does it behave the way it does?", "What are the main issues--philosophical, cultural, political, sociological economic, and social psychological - - - which have shaped the behavior of the elementary school in America?".

Section three takes us a step further and asks a very pragmatic question. It is entitled Challenges and Options and it asks, "What alternatives are there for the elementary school today?", "What in the way of alternatives to conventional schools, to curricula

reform, to teaching roles and to schools as socializers are available to us?".

And lastly section four of the yearbook brings us back to our original thesis--Coping with Change. This section, Change: Today and Tomorrow raises the ultimate question of significance. "What significance has the past, the present, and the available alternatives for educational reform have for immediate and long range planning?".

Obviously, this yearbook was well thought out. I have always had a great deal of respect for Harold Shane, particularly when I lived on the East Coast, and for John Goodlad, particularly since he is my Dean while I live on the West Coast. So I hope, therefore, you would all agree that from coast--to--coast they are not only among the most outstanding and influential educators in the area of elementary schooling, but also after you have read this book--I hope you will also agree that its organization and rationale has been masterfully conceived.

Now, briefly let us run quickly through the four sections in an attempt to make explicit six themes discussed in the Yearbook's Introduction.

The themes are as follows:

1. The elementary school has evolved with a steadily expanding role taking on more and more of the responsibilities of other institutions such as the family, recreation, and preparation for the work place.

2. Equality of educational opportunity means not only that pupils attending the same school should have equal opportunity, that is the equality of imput, but also equality of educational opportunity means that on the average groups of children regardless of background should leave school on an equal basis, particularly in terms of how much they have achieved (or the equality of output).

3. The clarification of roles, responsibilities and decision making structures is needed to free the school and individual teachers to be different, to explore, to be unique in serving elementary school children and their communities.

4. Advances in knowledge, and changes in society inevitably are out of step with the school's curriculum and organization.

5. There is a need to capture the strengths of the behaviorists and the humanists and to synthesize their premises and their methods into meaningful approaches to childhood learning and development.

6. Deschooling society may be one pole of, if not a challenge to, existing assumption, but even though radical departures from present modes of schooling may be necessary, an absolute deschooling of society is not.

Whether we agree or disagree, approve or disapprove, endorse or dispute--these six themes penetrate each of the sections and for the most part each of the chapters in the yearbook.

For example, in the section of the "Elementary School in Perspective", Goodlad's chapter on the School as a Social Institution covers almost all of these themes, and on the deschooling issue claims "that many of those condemning the schools as inhumane and recommending their abolition are romanticizing other agencies in society". He mentions other institutions, some of our most sacred, and provides vivid examples of why the child's environment "is not yet benign out there".

Henry Otto's chapter on the Historical Roots of the school also cuts across most of the themes. It is one of the few historical backgrounds of the elementary school that takes into account the issue of equality for women, minorities and the poor. The perspective provided by Sol Cohen in his 20th Century view of the elementary school makes an excellent point on another theme of the Yearbook--the enormous slippage from educational ideas to educational practice. In this chapter Cohen comments on the issue of the school's expanding role, as follows:

> "...critics attribute exaggerated importance to the role of the elementary school in society. To many critics", he continues, "the schools are the source of all social ills, or the basis of all social improvements."

The final chapter of the first section by Alice Miel, says implicity "All right, you have your themes ranging from the expanding role of schools in society to the deschooling of society, so what are your options?". She suggests many and does it in a very straight forward manner. But when you read it, you become impressed with her treatment of the theme I mentioned earlier about how advances in our knowledge are out of step with what takes place behind the classroom doors. She states simply that we "can fashion from (all that we already know) an educational institution new in its form, new in its use of the community, and new in its offerings to children".

The chapters by Philip G. Smith, Doris Lee, Arthur Foshay, and Charles Benson deal with the context of the elementary school. The themes referred to earlier find their expression in the philosophical frames of references which have resulted in, as Smith suggests, at least three approaches to teacher preparation and three conceptions of the teaching-learning situation, all of which suggest nine distinct programs for training institutions. This was an excellent chapter for those of us indirectly involved with the child. Doris Lee, on the other hand, speaks somewhat to the issue of the blend between behavioralism and humanism. Her chapter, "Views of the Child" really addresses itself to beliefs concerning the nature of man and deals forceably with issues of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Arthur Foshay's chapter also spans across the major themes I have identified when he examines the main sources for elementary school practices. In the conclusion to Foshay's chapter, however, he underscores one major point when he states:

> "The school is a kind of subculture in which are preserved the relics of former times, with a few practices added or subtracted because of contemporary thought."

Finally, Charles Benson, who recently directed the Fleishman Commission Study of School Financing in New York State, scrutinizes the elementary school as an economic activity, focusing most clearly on the redistribution of decision making and particularly of financial resources so that a fairer resource commitment to the elementary school might be fostered.

In the third section on "Challenges and Options for Today" Robert Anderson explores several provocative alternatives for organizing and staffing the schools and asks a question that has been plaguing me at least since the days of Team Teaching, whether teachers who may be affected by the intervention of new organizational arrangements will, in turn, affect children's behavior. In her chapter, Wilma Longstreet looks at the curriculum and descriptively illustrates what she calls the transition and confusion of the 60's. Greta and Harold Morine, also, examine the demands on teachers and how the roles have changed because of emphases on learning processes, objectives, social relations, accountability and student achievement. I think you will find this chapter useful particularly should you be from California or are aware of our "famous" Stull Bill. Smith and Schumacher deal with the implications of the social and cultural context of the school as a source for alternatives. Dealing primarily with the quality of input issue, they argue that the socialization processes in the schools deserve a high priority on the research agendas of social scientists. In short, Section III, Challenges and Options, spans across all six dimensions I have outlined as significant themes in this yearbook.

I would like to conclude this part of our discussion by showing how this yearbook associated the following themes with the future: Recalling those I mentioned earlier, (1) the school's expanding role, (2) equal educational opportunities; (3) restructuring the schools, (4) the discontinuity between our knowledge and our practice, (5) the behaviorist-humanist issue, and (6) the deschooling question.

First, in the chapter by Owen Knox, who is an Area Administrator in Los Angeles, and myself we place emphasis on the uncoordinated, disjointed attack on social and educational problems in the urban environment, and call for a more strategic method for policy making in order to connect the responses of large urban school systems to the dynamic sociopolitical forces in the environment. Mary Bentzen and Ken Tye stress the leadership capacity of those involved in educational change within the elementary school. Their chapter is especially timely in its discussion of a five year study directed by John Goodlad in the League of Cooperating Schools. Bureaucracy and adherence to norms, value dilemmas, change strategies and an emphasis on systems planning illustrated the connection between the points covered in the Bentzen and Tye chapter and the six themes outlined earlier.

The final chapter by Harold Shane, upon first perusal, appears to be the Rod Serling chapter of this edition of the NSSE yearbook. I personally have an aversion to those who construct "twilight zones" for me and others, but Shane's chapter, Prospects and Prerequisites for the Improvement of Elementary Education: 1973-1985 is one of the best treatments of futurism I have ever seen. He not only ferrets out many of the contemporary tasks of education and places them aside those for the future, but he develops a model which he describes "as an infrastructure that seems consistent with what we know of learning and development and which educators should be able to implement with the resources and the talent to be found in the present educational community."

Admittedly, this 72nd yearbook of the NSSE covers a wide range of topics. However, it is well organized and it sets forth numerous themes of which I have stressed only six seemingly major points the book contributes to me. Its contribution to those of us working with educators at the university will be useful both as a basic textbook, or supplementary reading, but also as a source of ideas, hypotheses, and problem areas for future research, development and application. To those of you directly involved at either the district, school or classroom it should be an invaluable tool, if you will,

for stimulating new ventures, approaches and practices, as well as understanding the "why" and "what" of what you are currently doing.

Question Three: Its Uniqueness

The third question I asked at the very outset of this discussion was so what? What is unique about this book that others in the field do not already cover? Well, I can be very brief on this one. First, there are few polemics; there are no panaceas; there is an emphasis on the past, but also on the turbulent sixties, and there are no simple conclusions nor indictments. It has a social science orientation, which is not the case with many books in this field. And while it does not provide answers, is not entirely optimistic, nor does it portray a dismal, pessimistic future. Even though everyone knows, of course, a pessimist is the same as an optimist, but better informed. It is unique and it is the best book around in the elementary school which brings me to my conclusion, and the final question--how should it be read?

Question Four: Reading It

Almost everyone who has read this book or who is aware of it will tell you--this is a book that cannot be skimmed. It requires careful and thoughtful attention. While it is well-organized, carefully planned and logically conceived each chapter stands alone and must issue forth on its own right. So my advice is to read it carefully from beginning to end--plan to do it a chapter at a time.

Conclusion

In summary, then...

Question: Is this yearbook necessary?

Answer: Yes, because it is about an institution three centuries old, in one form or another, that is under stress and is coping with change. Margaret Mead spoke of the speed of change and of adults as immigrants to their native land; others call it a generation gap--a chasm, amorphously situated in time and space, that separated those who have grown up absurd from those who will, with luck, grow up absurd.

Question: What is its contribution?

Answer: It is a landmark publication of the Society which will serve as a basis for practitioners, laymen and scholars who are attempting to understand the basic structure, function and content of elementary schooling in our society. It illustrates how certain biases, certain bureaucratic features, and certain forces and ideas have led to our present elementary school. As we move from "What is it?"--to--"Why does it behave that way?"--to--"What alternatives or options are available?"--to--"What does it mean for the future?" All I can say is read this book; it is unique and it is important. And it is ultimately about the child in the elementary school. This book asks all of us to think about that child in all parts of this country and in all countries of the world. As Sam Levenson puts it--"It is... impossible to teach children in masses...A "class" is an arbitrary grouping of seemingly

homogeneous beings, no two...anymore alike than two snowflakes. If it were possible to place children under a microscope, one would find the least of them inspiringly beautiful, distinctively designed. When we gather too many flakes or children, the loveliness of individuality is lost and what we get is all white, the ultimate in neutrality."

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